

Purple Poppies

On October 2nd, I led a St Francis' Day service at Burnage celebrating the lives of animals that are or have been an important part of our lives in the present or the past. There was laughter and there were tears. Animals of all shapes and sizes have a way of touching our emotions strongly. We love them and they love us in sickness and in health, in peacetime and in war.

During November, the red paper poppy has become an iconic symbol, with millions of commemorative flowers produced each year as part of the Royal British Legion's Poppy Appeal to honour British war dead.

Since 2006, some people have also been wearing purple poppies, introduced by the charity Animal Aid. Rather than being associated with humans who have died serving, the purple poppy is in remembrance of animals that lost their lives at war, especially the equine, canine or pigeon/dove service animals of the First World War.

In 2015, Animal Aid replaced the purple poppy with enamel purple paws, because they felt the symbol was being misinterpreted and the animals were being regarded as heroes rather than victims. The following year, purple poppies were on sale again, this time being adopted by Murphy's Army charity. The British Legion does not endorse the purple poppy but has no problem with its being worn beside the red and white poppies, but they should not be sold or offered alongside one another.

Many animals are abandoned intentionally or unintentionally during times of war due to their owners or keepers being killed, injured, conscripted, captured or having to flee at a moment's notice. Just like humans, animals may suffer from shell-shock, PTSD, separation anxiety or physical injury. Volunteers and trained animal nurses and vets work tirelessly in Syria, Afghanistan and more recently in Ukraine to offer care, love and support to animals caught up in areas of conflict

Many charities other than Animal Aid and Murphy's Army are involved in rescue and care for animals in areas of conflict. Examples include: IFAW, SPANA, Blue Cross, War Paws, Nowzad, The Brooke, Ernesto's Sanctuary for cats and other animals in Syria, ROLDA and Animals Asia.

Both Jesus and St. Francis were concerned with the support and care of the neglected, marginalised and often-overlooked members of the communities they served. We can use them as a model and example on Remembrance Day, during the two minutes' silence, when we call to mind all those humans and animals, civilians and those serving in the armed services, who have been killed or who have been and/or are affected by war, conflict or civil unrest. During those two minutes ask yourself: "What am I being prompted to do financially or in other ways, to respond to the things I have been thinking about?"

Roger Newton

When you remember those who fought,
do you give the animals any thought?
The ones whose lives were claimed to serve,
the pain and fear they did not deserve!

Without the raise of a hoof or paw
to give consent for the things they saw,
Such bravery from those of animal kind

the Purple Poppy is worn today to remind.

They had no choice, the choice was made!
Alongside their masters, their part they played
and without the raise of a hoof or paw,
their lives were taken in the human war.

Janice Walkden